

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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Whole No. 384



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 59

SNAPS

Frank Tousey's colored covered comic weekly. Reprinted stories from the earlier black and white Comic Library. Began Oct. 11, 1899 and ended Feb. 20, 1901, 32 pages, normal size colored covered weekly 8x11. 72 issues.

THE ANATOMY OF DIME NOVELS

No. 1 — Nick Carter

By J. Edward Leithead

Ralph Cummings wrote an article, "Just What is a Dime Novel?", for Happy Hours Magazine, July-August 1935 issue. He said "... a dime novel is a paper-covered book. If the book has cloth or cardboard covers, it is not a dime novel. Originally, they told their story in 100 pages or less. A novel of 64 pages was quite a common length, but some had less, some had more. The page size was about 4x6 inches, but they have run as high as 10x15 inches. As a general rule, the bigger the page size, the fewer the number of pages. In the beginning the booklet type of 100 pages was the common type. Before the turn of the century the large page size predominated, 8½x11, and the number of pages was, fairly consistent, 32. Some types ran only 16 pages, and some had more than 32, often standardizing on 48.

"On the front cover you will find an action picture . . . As time went on, they toned down, but always the picture showed a critical moment even though it occurred in a football game or at the stock ticker."

These front covers, originally black-and-white illustrations, changed to color covers in the late nineties; also, although many of the black-and-white novels sold for a dime, the later color cover publications mostly sold for a nickel—but are still called "dime novels."

Ralph Smith had this to say about "What Made Dime Novels Popular?" in the January-February 1935 issue of his Happy Hours Magazine. "Let us take up the price. Some were a nickel and some were a dime. This brought

the price down within the reach of all, and hardly any excuse for one not owning a copy if he had the desire to buy one. As they sold into millions of copies, there is no question but what they were desired, but I do not think that there were many sold just because they were so cheap, there was another reason . . .

"Was it the author? A few novels were issued by authors well-known at the time, but fully 90 per cent were unknown, unheard of and unsung . . . We'll have to admit that no one was vitally interested in the author in those days.

"Was it the story? I mean by that were they all so well written, with such wonderful plots, that they secured a reputation for issuing, once a week, a great yarn? Most of the dime novels were written in a hurry. At times, part of the story was on the press when the last half hadn't left the author's mind. Thousands were written to order . . . So no great work of literature was issued every week."

I'd like to add this to what Ralph says: these dime novel writers turned out consistently good yarns: Edward S. Ellis, Captain Frederick Whittaker, Francis W. Doughty, Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey, Frederick W. Davis, W. Bert Foster, Prentiss Ingraham, Harry St. George Rathborne, Gilbert Patten, William Wallace Cook, George C. Jenks, Thomas C. Harbaugh, John H. Whitson, Cornelius Shea, Ned Buntline. There were others, of course, so, boys, add the name of your favorite to this list.

Ralph Smith goes on: "Was it the 'continuation' complex? I mean, did

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they sell over a period of time because we wanted to see what happened next to our friends in the story we were reading? Partly this was a big factor. We did get to look upon our favorite characters as actual friends, and we were interested to see what happened next. Thus the popularity of Nick Carter, Frank Merriwell, Old King Brady, etc., but note that many a 'series story' did not live long and many of the characters did not 'take.' While I concede that this was the second most vital factor, I cannot place it first, because other dime novels and libraries enjoyed as long lives and they did not have a central character, but a different type of story every week.

• "As I said, several factors made for the popularity of dime novels, and probably no one of them alone. If asked to name the most likely reason that popularized the dime novel I would say, the covers.

"Every week, on the front cover of the countless thousands of dime novels, appeared a well drawn, unusually well colored picture of some dramatic incident in the story. The purchaser who looked in the window of the periodical store got many a thrill just looking at the covers. I recall my own experience when, week after week, I'd walk a mile or so and spend fifteen minutes 'just lookin' . . . wondering how to spend that nickel. The choice was hard. Every cover showed a tight fix, and boy, it was worth a nickel to see how he got out of his predicament. We'd buy 'em, even if we didn't ever find out how the villain was overcome. Don't believe it? Look at your own stock of novels. How many have you got NOW, that haven't even had the pages cut?"

Let's dissect one of these novels—or, in this instance, a series of them all more or less related, which are good examples of the work of Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey, the premier writer of Nick Carters—and see what the contents of dime novels was like.

Livingstone Carruthers was an all-round English crook of the Gay Nine-

ties, specializing in diamond smuggling at the time Fred Dey introduced him to Nick Carter's legion of followers in *Tracked Across the Atlantic*, or, *Nick Carter Among the Smugglers*, a New York Weekly serial which never reached New Nick Carter Weekly (it would have made two issues of the latter), but was reprinted as #4 Magnet Library and #940 New Magnet. Carruthers pulled a slick trick by leaving the diamonds, for which he was searched by a customs officer (tipped off in advance) as soon as he stepped from an ocean liner, concealed in his stateroom and returning for them later in disguise. He fooled Nick once, he fooled him twice; finally Chick, Nick's first assistant, got into the case with his chief and nearly lost his life crossing the Atlantic in the long pursuit. They landed Carruthers, but—

October 15, 1904 was the date on New Nick Carter Weekly #407, *A Bank President's Plot*, or, *Three Villains of a Stripe*. Quite a long time since we first heard of Livingstone Carruthers, for, although I do not know the exact date of the New York Weekly serial, the reprint of *Tracked Across the Atlantic* in Magnet #4 was published about 1897. Mr. Dey, however, had a long memory for criminal characters out of the ordinary. In *A Bank President's Plot* "the Midland Bank was robbed of three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The watchman was killed and his body thrown into the river. The policeman on the beat, Mullen, was severely injured . . . the robbery was committed by two English crooks who were admitted to the bank and to the safe where the money was by Isaac Meadows, the president of the bank . . . It was discovered that Meadows was an old-time crook who had been known in the past as "Lucky Morgan"—and one of the English crooks was a Carruthers!

Nick almost believes it is Livingstone Carruthers when he encounters the bank robber in the second of the series, #408, *The Master Criminal*, or, *With the Devil in His Eye*, but it is

his brother Morris. On this occasion Nick, guarding against surprise as he realizes his quarry's craftiness, "attached his two 'spring pistols' inside his coat sleeves . . . They were short weapons of thirty-eight caliber . . . so arranged that by a (slinging) motion of either arm, he could throw one of them into his hand, discharge it, and by releasing it, allow it to return up his sleeve so quickly that the eye could not discover that he had held a weapon." Although powder-smoke and a bullet dead on the target were a giveaway.

So, detective and master criminal meet, a voice speaking behind the former in an apparently empty house in the Bronx. "Nick wheeled like lightning, and the gun in his left sleeve flew into his grasp as if by magic, while with his right hand he cast the ray of the light he carried full into the face of the man who had spoken. What he saw was a handsome, smiling, careless countenance."

A little later, "You are as alike as two peas," said Nick.

"As like as whom?" asked Carruthers.

"Your late lamented brother Livingstone."

"You have already referred to that fact once," remarked Carruthers with a dangerous glint in his eye, which remained there an instant only.

"As alike as can be," continued the detective in a musing tone, more as if he were communing with himself than addressing another. "Both tall, both handsome—"

"Don't mention it, I beg of you."

"Both insolent. Both athletic—"

"As you shall presently discover when this visitation of yours is at an end."

"Both shrewd and sharp. Both witty; and both, also, as great scoundrels as ever went unhung."

"Really, Carter, you overpower me. You do, really. Can you think of nothing else in which we resemble each other?"

"Yes, one more thing; but that is to come."

"Tell me what it is!"

"I think I will leave that to the future. Your brother Livingstone thought he could get the best of Nick Carter, and that little self-deception on his part ended by costing him his life. I will not be surprised if you will be alike in the fate which overtakes you."

Morris Carruthers doubted this, not knowing at the moment of the '33 pops up Nick Carter's coat sleeves; in fact, he didn't die in this issue, but he wore handcuffs at its conclusion. And the following issue, #409, "the Carruthers Puzzle, or, Nick Carter's Best Disguise, involved Morris, brother of the late Livingstone, in a plot directed and "worked successfully on the New York police and culminating in a murder in"—of all places—"a patrol wagon." Nick, disguised in the colorful attire of an East Indian, with turban and sash, arrests Morris Carruthers on the steps of a brownstone front dwelling (pictured on the cover by Edward Johnson) by the more or less simple method of slugging the scoundrel. He was enabled to get close enough for the KO by inquiring of Carruthers the way to Fifth Avenue, speaking so indistinctly "that Carruthers was obliged to incline his head and ask that the question be repeated."

"Nick repeated it more brokenly than before and in the meantime the door had opened softly and a young woman had appeared in the aperture."

"Wait a minute, Inez," said Carruthers, "until I get rid of this fellow." Then turning to Nick he added: "I don't understand you. Say it again."

"It was the invitation which Nick desired. He began speaking again, at the same time mounting the steps, until he stood on the top one, level with Carruthers. Then, instead of repeating the question, he struck a mighty blow with his right hand." It nearly tore Carruthers' head off his shoulders. "At the same instant there was a shriek behind Nick. The shriek was followed by a loud report almost in his ear and the whirr of a bullet past his head. Then the door of the house was slammed shut."

But Nick did not, just then, bother with the young woman called Inez who had fired at him. He wasn't hurt and it seemed at first he had broken Carruthers' neck. It would have saved much future trouble had he used his "pick-lock" (his own invention for opening doors) and arrested Inez on the spot. For, after all, Carruthers' neck wasn't broken; he didn't go to a mortician or a hospital under guard, but into a cell at police headquarters.

Inez Navarro, the Spanish beauty who shot at Nick and missed, has the leading criminal role in #410, *Inez, the Mysterious, or, The Master Criminal's Mascot*. She and Morris Carruthers had planned several things—all outside the law, naturally—to make them quickly rich. Now, because of Nick Carter's interference, Carruthers is in jail awaiting trial on several counts, one of them murder. Inez has a twin sister, Carmen, and a brother Pancho, who owns a trained ape that can open doors. "The ape climbs up the front of houses (that have been cased for robbery), enters by an open or unlocked window, then goes down the stairs and opens the front door for him (Pancho). It had been perfectly trained to do that trick." And it was as effective as if Pancho had a key to fit every lock.

Inez, when Carruthers' trial ends in a conviction for first degree murder and a death sentence, vows that the man who so fascinated her shall never enter the death chamber at Sing Sing. Nick Carter, she learns, is to accompany the police escort unofficially, to make doubly sure that the man who was so hard to catch does not escape. In #411, *The Criminal Queen's Oath, or, The Difference Between Two*, Inez plans to use her sister Carmen in her scheme to spring Carruthers from the grip of the law. She has been able to steer clear of Nick, though he made several attempts to trace and arrest her as Carruthers' accomplice (the latter had called her his mascot, but she hadn't brought him much luck so far). Shortly before Carruthers is to be taken from the Tombs to Grand

Central Station, thence to Sing Sing, under police guard, Nick Carter receives a message from Inez, offering to surrender to the law if he will come to a certain number at Central Park West. To condense her message:

"You will think this is a trick and a trap. All right. Have you the nerve to make the gamble? Surely there are enough police to escort a handcuffed man on the train. I've heard you'd rather put me behind bars than any dozen other criminals in New York since you were lucky enough to arrest Morris Carruthers. Would you like to prove that isn't just talk, Nick Carter? If so, here's your chance."

It was a challenge to Nick that he might have ignored at another time; but the arrest of this fascinating woman, capable of any crime though she didn't look it, hence "the criminal queen," was important to him and to his reputation. There was some trick in it, and it had something to do with the transfer of Carruthers to Sing Sing. But Nick Carter could be as tricky as the next; he sent Chick to join the escort at the Grand Central Station, and so often had the first assistant (and adopted son) "made up" like his chief that Chickering Carter could very nearly fool Patsy Garvan or Ten-Ichi or Ida Jones.

(to be continued)

DIME NOVELS AGAIN IN PRINT!!

Gold Star Books, Capital Building, Derby, Conn., has undertaken the publication of one of our favorite western dime novel series, *Buffalo Bill Stories* and *Wild West Weekly*. The first 4 are now on the newsstands, 2 *Buffalo Bill Stories* and 2 *Wild West Weeklies*. Price is 40 cents each. If you cannot find them on your newsstands, ask for them or order them directly from the publisher at 45c ea. The glossy covers outdo the originals. In addition to the feature story each contains a western dime novel from the *Wide Awake Library*. Your editor is consultant for the series and hopes that they will "catch on." They are a welcome relief from the material

usually found for sale these days.

—ETL

COMMENTS ABOUT "FRANK MERRIWELL'S FATHER"

I have read FRANK MERRIWELL'S FATHER, the new autobiography. For Merriwell fans it's a must and even those who haven't any interest in the Merriwells will enjoy reading this self-written history of an author who was among the greats in the Dime Novel era. Patten died shortly after I went into the book publishing business but I met him in New York city to discuss publishing a paperback and not only derived pleasure from the conference but was thrilled to meet the author of stories which I had read and reread in my early teens.

—Ed Levy

I have read Patten's autobiography and it is very good as far as Patten wrote it. But the remaining part which brings his life down to his death is very weak, shows that the authors have done very little research. One flaw in the book is the lack of a bibliography and the list of pen names is meagre. This could have been a really great book if the editors would have included a bibliography.

—Stanley Pachon

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Ed: I am sorry to say I did not get any inquiries, not to say orders, from my last ad in the Round-Up. I still have them and if any one wants any I'd be only too glad to receive an order.—Roy E. Swanstrom, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.

Dear Eddie: This may not be news to you, but the Variety issue of August 12, 1964, reports from Hollywood

that Desilu Productions which owns the film rights to the Frank Merriwell books has signed writer-producer-director Leslie Henens to do a half hour pilot for a prospective series based on the Merriwell stories. Henens, his non-exclusive deal will write the pilot and serve as executive producer. I assume if successful this will be shown during the 1964-65 season. I have wondered when the TV studios would discover Frank Merriwell. Now I wonder if they will do justice to Patten's hero. But all in all this would give a wonderful boost to our hobby and the writer who gave us so much pleasure thru his stories.—Stanley Pachon, Bethlehem, Pa.

Dear Eddie: I am down in the dumps today. My brother died last Tuesday. It sure is a blow to me. I don't think I will ever get over it. I had been with him for 78 years and we were very close. I have lots of novels for sale at 25c each plus postage.—Bob Frye, 895 Morgan Ave., Schenectady 9, N. Y.

Dear Mr. LeBlanc: The Round-up continues very interesting and we appreciate the fine job you're doing with it.—E. G. Ingraham, Havertown, Pa.

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- 227. R. J. Hussesy, One Main St. West, Webster, N. Y. 14580 (New member)
- 228. Arthur N. Carter, 28½ Pine St., Atleboro, Mass. (Old member)
- 229. Jack Herman, 344 Cherry Place, East Meadow, N. Y. (New member)
- 212. Gerry de la Ree, 75 Wyckoff Ave., Wyckoff, N. J. 07481 (New address)
- 230. H. J. Ryan, Box 281, Nashville, Tenn. 37202 (New member)

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